The aim of this course is to examine the place of the theatre in the life of the Czech nation. The National Theatre in Prague (first opened in 1868) stands as the chief symbol of Czech patriotism, and the city is the home of an extraordinary network of theatres of various types and traditions. The Czech national anthem sprang from a song in a nineteenth-century play. When the Velvet Revolution broke out in November 1989, it was in theatres that many of the revolutionary strike committees held their meetings; and when the communist regime fell, Václav Havel, the dissident playwright and intellectual, was elected president of Czechoslovakia. We shall discuss the works of some of the most significant playwrights from the nineteenth-century to the present (such as J.K. Tyl, Karel Čapek and Václav Havel), considering the contexts from which they emerged, and the impact they have had on Czech (and international) audiences. The theatre’s potential to bring about political change will be among the topics discussed.